Equity and Adequacy in Non-Teaching Staff Allocation Across Primary Schools in Chunya District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the equity and adequacy of non-teaching staff allocation in public primary schools in Chunya District, Tanzania. It draws on the second specific objective of a wider qualitative study of education resource distribution in the district. Guided by Equity and Resource Allocation Theory, the article considers whether staffing reflects schools' different needs and circumstances. The study used interviews with 44 participants from Mtanila, Lupa and Nkung'ungu wards, alongside a review of official documents. The participant categories require verification before publication: the abstract and methodology give inconsistent descriptions of one officer. The findings indicate that clerks, cleaners, librarians and office attendants were often unavailable or insufficient, while many schools relied mainly on watchmen and cooks. Participants described greater shortages in rural schools than in schools near trading centres. They also reported that teachers took on some administrative and supervisory duties, while community contributions helped schools employ temporary workers but were difficult to sustain. The article argues that staff allocation should respond more closely to school-level needs and recommends needs-based recruitment, measures to attract staff to rural postings, and regular monitoring of staffing distribution.

Keywords: equity, non-teaching staff, resource allocation, primary education, Chunya District, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Effective primary school management depends on qualified teachers and adequate non-teaching support. Clerks, watchmen, cooks, cleaners, office attendants and records assistants help schools maintain administration, sanitation and security (UNESCO, 2015). When these staff is absent or insufficient, teachers may have to take on additional administrative and supervisory duties, which can reduce the time available for classroom work (World Bank, 2017).

Disparities in the deployment of educational personnel are not unique to Tanzania. In England, national administrative data covering more than 12,000 primary schools showed that schools in disadvantaged areas experienced higher staff turnover and more acute shortages of specialized support staff than schools in wealthier areas (Allen, Burgess, & Mayo, 2021). In Kenya, a study of 180 public primary schools found major imbalances in staffing between rural and urban counties, with rural and arid schools facing the most severe shortages of administrative personnel (Muthama & Kyalo, 2022). Within Tanzania itself, Msuya and Kinyota (2023) documented persistent shortages of non-teaching staff in rural districts, resulting in high teacher workloads, multi-grade teaching arrangements, and reduced supervision compared with urban schools.

In Chunya District, Mbeya Region, preliminary observations indicated that primary schools varied considerably in the categories and numbers of non-teaching staff assigned to them, with several schools depending almost entirely on community-supported temporary workers. This pattern raised concern about whether the distribution of non-teaching personnel across the district's primary schools reflected the equitable allocation envisaged in national education policy, or whether it merely mirrored existing disparities between rural and better resourced schools.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: How are non-teaching staff distributed among public primary schools in Chunya District? It reports findings related to the second specific objective of the wider study.

Research Gap and Contribution

The studies cited in this article discuss staffing differences and shortages in different settings. However, the manuscript provides limited evidence on how non-teaching staff allocation is experienced by school leaders and community representatives in the selected wards of Chunya District. This article addresses that local evidence gap by examining reported staff categories, perceived adequacy, differences between schools and the responses used to manage shortages. Its contribution is therefore contextual and qualitative. It does not claim to establish the first study of non-teaching staff allocation in Tanzania.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to examine the equity and adequacy of non-teaching staff allocation across public primary schools in Chunya District. Specifically, it sought to identify the categories of non-teaching staff assigned to schools, assess the adequacy of these staff in supporting school operations, examine differences in staff distribution between schools, describe the challenges arising from staffing shortages and imbalances, and identify strategies currently used to improve the distribution of non-teaching staff within the district.

Significance of the Study

The article focuses on non-teaching staff; an area that has received less attention in the manuscript's cited literature than teacher deployment and school infrastructure. Its contribution is context-specific: it brings together accounts from head teachers, Ward Education Officers and School Committee Members in three wards of Chunya District, and considers these accounts alongside official documents. The evidence can help district and school leaders identify reported staffing gaps. However, because the study is qualitative and covers selected wards, the findings should not be treated as a numerical estimate of staffing shortages across every primary school in the district.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is guided by Equity and Resource Allocation Theory, grounded in the classical work of Adams (1965) and later extended to organizational and public service contexts, including education, by Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978). The theory holds that resources should be distributed fairly according to need, contribution, and the contextual circumstances of beneficiaries, rather than uniformly across units. Applied to non-teaching staff allocation, the theory directs attention to whether schools receive support personnel in proportion to their pupil enrolment, geographical remoteness, and administrative workload, or whether allocation instead follows a flat, one-size-fits-all pattern that disregards these differences.

The theory has been criticized on several grounds. Caiyan (2022) argues that it is too simplistic in focusing narrowly on proportional sharing while overlooking historical disadvantage and deeper structural problems. Its reliance on subjective perceptions of fairness means that different stakeholders may define equity differently (Walster et al., 1978), and it offers limited insight into systemic rural urban divides inherited from earlier policy regimes. Nonetheless, the theory usefully establishes a clear standard against which actual allocation practice can be measured, helps identify where imbalances lie, and supports the view that remote or disadvantaged schools require more not equal support to reach comparable standards of service delivery (Morando & Merriman, 2012).

Working Definitions of Equity and Adequacy

For this article, equity refers to whether staff allocation takes account of differences in schools' needs and circumstances, including enrolment, location, workload and the staff already available. Equity does not necessarily mean that every school receives the same number of staff. Adequacy refers to whether the available

categories and number of non-teaching staff are sufficient to support the administrative, sanitation, security and other operational duties described by participants. The present manuscript does not identify an official staffing ratio or benchmark against which adequacy can be calculated. The findings therefore describe participants' experiences and the patterns visible in the documents reviewed; they should not be interpreted as a formal audit against a national staffing standard. The authors should add the applicable official standard and its full citation if one was used in the original study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Study Area

The study used a qualitative approach to explore how non-teaching staff were allocated and how participants experienced staffing arrangements in schools. It was conducted in Mtanila, Lupa and Nkung'ungu wards in Chunya District, Mbeya Region. The wards were selected because they represented different socio-economic conditions, geographical settings and pupil populations. The manuscript does not state a specific qualitative design, such as a case study or phenomenological design. The authors should name and justify the design actually used, based on the original research plan.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The target population was reported as 146 people, including primary school personnel and School Management Committee members. The sample comprised 44 participants: 14 head teachers, three Ward Education Officers, one officer whose title is inconsistently reported in the manuscript, and 26 School Committee Members. Purposive sampling was used because these participants were expected to have direct knowledge of staffing allocation and school operations. The authors should verify the target-population description and the officer's correct job title against the sampling records. They should also explain how the sample size of 44 was judged sufficient for the research question and report whether data saturation was assessed. If saturation was not assessed, the manuscript should state this limitation rather than imply that it was achieved.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with head teachers, Ward Education Officers, the relevant district officer and School Committee Members. The interviews addressed staff categories, staffing levels, differences between schools, challenges and possible responses. Secondary data came from official documents, including staffing records and district reports. The manuscript states that the data were analysed thematically, but does not describe the stages of analysis. The authors should report, using their actual procedures, how interview material was prepared, coded, grouped into categories, and developed into themes, and how documentary evidence was compared with interview accounts. These details must reflect the analysis that was carried out, not a procedure added after the study.

Trustworthiness and Research Ethics

The current manuscript does not provide enough information to establish which procedures were used to support trustworthiness or to document ethical approval. Before submission, the authors must add an accurate account based on the original study records. This should identify the actual steps taken to support credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, such as comparison of interview accounts with official records, review of interpretations, or maintenance of an audit trail, but only where these steps took place. The authors must also state the approving ethics committee or authority and approval reference, where applicable; how informed consent was obtained; how confidentiality was protected; and how participation remained voluntary. These details cannot be inferred from the current manuscript and must not be invented.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented fewer than five themes that emerged directly from the data, categories of non-teaching staff assigned to schools, adequacy of staff numbers, differences in distribution among schools, challenges arising from shortages, and strategies used to improve distribution.

Categories of Non-Teaching Staff Assigned to Schools

Across the fourteen schools studied, the common categories of non-teaching staff were watchmen, cooks, cleaners, and clerks, but many schools lacked several of these categories altogether, particularly office attendants, librarians, and cleaners. Several schools depended on community-supported temporary workers because government-employed support staff was inadequate.

> *Our school has only a watchman and one cook who assist in maintaining school activities. There are no cleaners or office attendants within the school, which increases the workload for teachers because some administrative duties are performed by teachers themselves.*
>
> Source: (HT2 interview 20 April, 10:41AM 2026)

Another participant explained that

> *Most primary schools within this ward have only a few categories of support staff such as watchmen and cooks. Important staffs such as librarians, cleaners, and office attendants are unavailable in many rural schools. This shortage affects school administration and service delivery.*
>
> Source :(HT2 interview 20 April, 10:41AM 2026)

These findings reflect UNESCO's (2015) observation that effective educational administration depends not only on teachers but also on support staff responsible for administration, security, sanitation, and pupil welfare. The findings can be interpreted through Equity and Resource Allocation Theory, which emphasises that resources should be distributed in relation to need. The findings showed that some schools had only a few non-teaching staff, while others lacked clerks, cleaners, librarians, cooks, and office attendants. Rural schools reported greater shortages than schools located near trading centres. This is supported by the theory because schools with greater staffing needs require more support staff. Therefore, the allocation of non-teaching staff should consider school enrolment, location, workload, and the number of staff available.

Adequacy of Non-Teaching Staff in Supporting School Operations

Even where a category of staff existed, the number available was frequently insufficient relative to enrolment and administrative demand. Many schools operated with only one cook or one watchman regardless of pupil numbers, forcing teachers and head teachers to take on additional non-teaching responsibilities.

> *The school has only one watchman and one cook who support daily school activities. There are no cleaners or office attendants responsible for sanitation and office management within the school. Because of this shortage, teachers are sometimes forced to supervise cleanliness and perform administrative duties outside classroom teaching.* Source (HT4 interview 22 April, 11:51AM 2026)

Another participant explained that

> *The number of support staff available in the school is not enough to maintain effective administration and school cleanliness. Some office activities are delayed because there are no clerks or office attendants responsible for administrative support. Source (HT10 interview 25 April, 11:22 AM 2026)*

Who argued that effective educational management depends on the availability of both teaching and non-teaching personnel, and with Hanushek's contention that educational quality rests on management effectiveness as much as on staffing levels alone. Applying the Equity and Resource Allocation Theory, the

persistence of numerically inadequate staffing irrespective of enrolment size suggests that allocation has not been aligned with actual operational needs of individual schools.

Differences in Distribution among Schools

Distribution of non-teaching staff was not uniform across the district. Schools located near trading and urban centres reported comparatively better access to clerks, watchmen, and cleaners, while remote rural schools reported serious and persistent shortages, partly because support staff was unwilling to work in areas with limited social services.

> *Schools located near trading centers have relatively better access to support staff compared to rural schools. In our school, there is only one watchman and one cook despite the large number of pupils and school activities.*
>
> Source :(HT5 interview 22 April, 12:54 PM 2026)

Another participant explained that

> *The distribution of non-teaching staff differs between rural and urban schools within the ward. Schools located near towns are more likely to have enough support staff because working conditions are relatively better. However, remote schools continue to experience shortages of cooks, cleaners, and office attendants.*
>
> Source: (WEO2 interview 25 April, 10:20AM 2026)

The reported rural–urban difference resembles patterns discussed by Muthama and Kyalo (2022) in Kenya and Allen, Burgess and Mayo (2021) in England. These comparisons provide context, but they do not establish that the causes or scale of the problem are the same across countries. From the perspective of Equity and Resource Allocation Theory, the findings raise concern that rural schools may not receive support in proportion to their needs. This interpretation should be read in light of the study's selected wards and qualitative evidence.

Challenges Arising from Shortages or Imbalances of Non-Teaching Staff

Respondents linked staffing shortages directly to increased teacher workload, administrative delays, weakened supervision, and reduced community confidence in school management.

> *The shortage of non-teaching staff increases workload among teachers because some teachers are forced to perform administrative and supervisory duties in addition to teaching activities. This situation affects teaching effectiveness because teachers fail to concentrate fully on classroom responsibilities.*
>
> Source: (HT6 interview 23 April, 10:10PM 2026)

Another participant explained that

> *Parents and community members become concerned when schools operate without enough support staff because school environments become less organized and less clean.*
>
> Source: (SM11 interview 23 April, 10:05AM 2026)

These consequences align with World Bank (2017) evidence that shortages of non-teaching staff reduce the quality of educational service delivery, and the findings are supported by the Equity and Resource Allocation Theory. The theory states that resources should be distributed according to the needs of institutions. The findings showed that shortages of non-teaching staff affected school administration, cleanliness, security, record keeping, and pupil supervision. Some teachers also carried out duties normally assigned to support staff. Rural schools reported greater difficulties because they had fewer non-teaching staff.

Strategies Used to Improve the Distribution of Non-Teaching Staff

Despite the shortages documented above, respondents described ongoing efforts to mitigate staffing gaps, principally through community contributions to fund temporary workers, gradual government recruitment, and monitoring by Ward Education Officers to prioritize schools with the most acute shortages.

> *The school administration cooperates with parents and community members in supporting employment of cooks and watchmen through voluntary contributions. This strategy has helped the school to continue operating despite shortages of government-employed support staff. However, financial limitations among parents reduce the sustainability of this support.*
>
> Source: (HT6 interview 23 April, 10:10PM 2026)

Another participant explained that

> *Ward education offices continue to supervise the distribution of support staff among schools to ensure that schools with serious shortages receive priority during staff allocation. The government also continues to recruit support staff gradually although the number of recruited personnel remains below school demands.* WEO2 interview 25 April, 10:20AM 2026)

While these measures have provided some relief, their dependence on community goodwill and gradual government recruitment means they fall short of a systematic, needs-based response. This is consistent with UNESCO's (2015) emphasis that sustainable improvement in staffing distribution requires firm government commitment complemented rather than substituted by community participation. The findings are supported by the Equity and Resource Allocation Theory. The theory states that resources should be distributed according to identified needs. The findings showed that the government used gradual recruitment and staff allocation, while some communities helped schools employ cooks, watchmen, and cleaners

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

Across the five themes, participants described gaps in the availability of non-teaching staff, reported that some teachers took on duties outside teaching, and identified greater staffing difficulties in remote rural schools. Community contributions and district-level monitoring were described as responses to these gaps, although participants also raised concerns about the sustainability of community-funded temporary workers. These are qualitative findings from the schools and wards included in the study. A school-by-school table showing the actual number and categories of staff would make the distributional claims easier to assess, but it should be included only if the original staffing records provide reliable figures.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that non-teaching staff allocation in the schools included in this study is uneven and, in many cases, insufficient for reported operational needs. Participants described reliance on watchmen and cooks, alongside shortages of clerks, cleaners, librarians, office attendants and records assistants. Rural schools were reported to face greater shortages than schools near trading centres. Participants also described teachers taking on some administrative and supervisory tasks, while community contributions helped fund temporary workers but were difficult to sustain. These findings raise concerns about whether staffing allocation reflects differences in school needs. However, the study does not provide a complete school-by-school staffing dataset or a formal staffing benchmark, so it cannot quantify the extent of inequity across all primary schools in Chunya District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the President’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Government should review non-teaching staff needs and prioritise schools with the most serious verified shortages. Deployment decisions should consider enrolment, the duties required at each school, location and

existing staffing levels. Where official staffing standards exist, the authorities should use them transparently when assessing gaps.

Chunya District Council and school management teams should review staffing records at least once each school year and report identified gaps to the relevant education authorities. School committees and communities may provide lawful, temporary support where recruitment is delayed, but such contributions should not replace the government's responsibility for sustainable staffing.

The government should consider practical measures to attract and retain non-teaching staff in rural schools, including suitable staff housing where feasible and other locally appropriate incentives. These measures should be assessed against recruitment and retention data to determine whether they improve staffing levels.

Limitations of the Study

The study draws on qualitative interviews and a review of documents in three wards. Its findings provide insight into participants' experiences and reported staffing patterns, but they cannot establish the prevalence of shortages across every public primary school in Chunya District. The manuscript also does not report a formal staffing benchmark or complete school-level staffing figures. These limits mean that the conclusions about equity and adequacy are interpretive rather than a quantified assessment against a specified standard.

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